

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL  
2101 Constitution Avenue Washington, D.C. 20418

March 8, 1996

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION  
BW Conversion Project  
March 8, 1996

Participants:

From DOD -- Laura Holgate, Special Coordinator for Cooperative Threat Reduction;  
Leo Michel, Director, Office of Non-Nuclear Arms Control

From NRC -- John Boright, Executive Director, Office of International Affairs; Chris  
Howson, Director, Board on International Health; Jo Husbands, Director, CISAC

**NOTE:** In almost all respects, the news is good. This meeting, like John Steinbruner's earlier conversation with Ash, made clear that a decision has been made to ask us to undertake a project on conversion assistance. The issue now is to find a mutually acceptable project design that can meet DOD's political concerns and still give the Academy sufficient flexibility to carry out a genuine planning and assessment process. As the notes below indicate, we are not anticipating that that will be prove an onerous substantive task, although the contracting bureaucracy may make it painful in other ways.

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Michel gave an overview of the policy concerns that DOD believes should shape the structure and plans for the proposed project. DOD, and the U.S. government more broadly, is interested in the potential of collaborative research programs with former Russian BW facilities to help provide confidence that the Russians are truly out of the business of offensive BW research. Providing constructive, scientifically useful, nonmilitary work for scientists with BW expertise is another important interest.

The problem is that the U.S. is not certain that all offensive BW activities have ceased in Russia. Since this was an unclassified conversation, we did not get details. But the continuing frustrations in the Trilateral government-to-government (US-UK-Russia) process, particularly the Russians unwillingness to share information, is clearly one source of these suspicions. There is no "smoking gun," but serious concerns remain about ongoing activities at both Obalensk and Koltsovo. DOD is therefore wary of any assistance to the Russians that could potentially support offensive BW work, including dual-use capabilities.

In addition, the Russians have proposed projects, through the Trilateral process, ISTC, and other venues (such as our discussions with Sandakhchiev on smallpox "paleobiology"), that would involve work on agents historically associated with BW. This has aroused nervousness, if not outright suspicions, that the Russians have not given up their

interest in these potential agents. Finally, given that there have been press reports in Russia (perhaps encouraged by some in the Russian government) accusing the U.S. of continuing secret offensive BW research, DOD is also not interested in cooperative projects that are too overtly curious or intrusive. DOD does not want to be vulnerable to charges it is interested for its own purposes in what the Russians have learned about potential BW agents.

DOD wants the NAS undertake a project to establish a comprehensive plan for cooperative research with former Russian BW facilities. The project is to proceed in phases. Initially the project would focus on Obalensk and Koltsovo, and on identifying projects that would provide benefits for existing public health problems in Russia. Examples include measles, diphtheria, hantavirus, and mumps. The "paleo-biology" project with Koltsovo, provided it is focused on influenza rather than smallpox, is fine. The key point is that, in the initial phases, the project should avoid work on human pathogens that have a traditional association with BW (anthrax, smallpox, Ebola, Marburg, etc.).

DOD is assuming that the project would be a one-year effort covering three stages:

- 1) Develop the action plan, including identification of potential research topics and projects;
- 2) Develop and select an initial set of research projects; and
- 3) With "whatever resources are left," provide funding for initial work on top priority projects, and plan for future years' activities.<sup>1</sup>

The potential for further funding to support the research program is clearly there, although it is obviously tied to the fate of the entire Nunn-Lugar program. DOD does not rule out eventually supporting work on highly pathogenic organisms, but right now the political climate in the U.S. is too sensitive. Cooperation must develop incrementally. We need to demonstrate that projects like these help build openness and confidence that we know what is really going on in Russia before we do potentially sensitive work. For example, a U.S. presence in Russian facilities, particularly for an extended period, could be useful, but the effectiveness of that can be "overblown." Soviet BW research was so compartmentalized that access to one part of a facility could not guarantee we knew what was going on all over the facility.

It will be important for the project to develop strong criteria for choosing and evaluating research programs. There should be some assurance that the research benefits the participants and Russia. We also need to be sure the Russians are using the money well.

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<sup>1</sup> NOTE: The BW Group has been envisioning being able to provide several hundred thousand dollars to the Russians as part of the demonstration projects, not simply "whatever is left over." We do not anticipate any objection from DOD to this larger amount of funding, and our initial budget estimates suggest that it will be possible to provide \$350-500,000.

[NOTE: We will have to devise satisfactory audit and inspection arrangements, to ensure that the funds are spent properly. I will check with other OIA offices to see how they handle this problem in their international grants.]

DOD is also funding a private contractor to do a study assessing the potential for converting former Russian BW facilities to commercially viable enterprises. The draft report is due in March and we should be able to have access. One initially promising area apparently is "bioremediation" for environmental clean-up, and we may want to consider including projects in this area in our planning.

We asked about whether we could include consideration of projects that would support broader international efforts to develop surveillance and monitoring capabilities to address the problems of emergent infectious diseases, and how Russia could support and become part of such efforts. We were assured that such projects would also be acceptable within the scope of our initial work, with the same caveat about avoiding agents historically associated with BW.

In one of John Steinbruner's meetings with the DOD folks, the issue of a DOD representative on the panel apparently came up. They understand that they cannot prescribe individuals or membership requirements, but they have tried to find someone they think would be sufficiently distinguished to be credible, helpful for our work, and would understand DOD's concerns. The name they have come up with is Peter Jahrling of USAMRIID.

Next steps. We need to draft a statement of work for the project, which we will negotiate, that can be the basis for a contract. We agreed that the issues of political sensitivities and policy guidance should be handled through a letter from Ash Carter or Harold Smith to the Academy, not by trying to include specific do's and don'ts in the contract. Jo will begin working on the statement of work ASAP. Laura Holgate hopes to know soon when we might actually expect to execute a contract; figuring that out was in part dependent on meeting with us to be sure we had a common understanding of the project.